

Author Mark Lane Claims FBI Plotted Against King

By CAROLE ASHKINAZE

Why was Martin Luther King Jr.'s police protection removed on the day of his assassination, and by whom?

Why was the same FBI squad which had originally been assigned to discredit King (whom they code-named 'Zorro') later directed to investigate his murder?

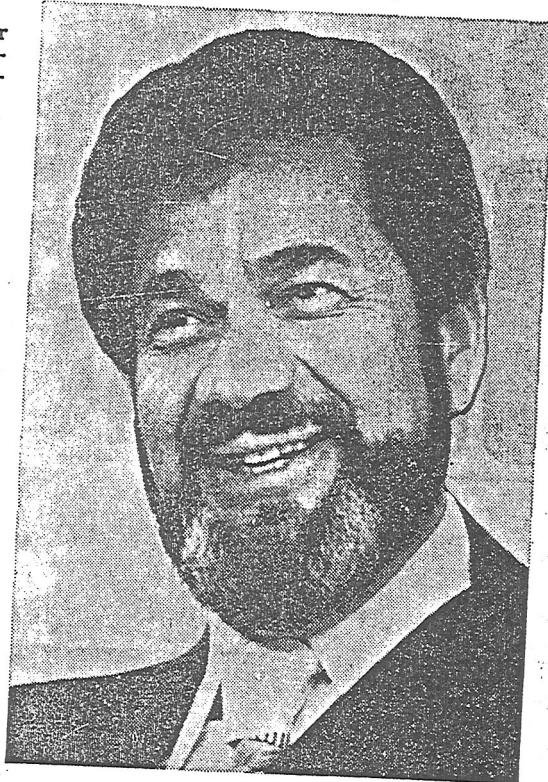
In what way has the most reliable witness been prevented, perhaps forever, from testifying in court?

These are some of the questions raised in "Code Name 'Zorro': The Murder of Martin Luther King Jr.," a chilling new book by the author of "Rush to Judgment," which 10 years ago poked holes in the Warren Commission's findings concerning the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

And Mark Lane, who collaborated with black comedian and civil rights worker Dick Gregory in the research and writing of "Code Name 'Zorro,'" said Thursday that their findings have led them to the grim conclusion that the FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover's direction, was deeply involved in a covert campaign to "destroy" King.

For example, Lane said in an interview in Atlanta, "Dr. King was subjected to electronic surveillance every minute of his life, starting in the early 1960s." Basing his allegations on information supplied by former FBI Special Agent Arthur Murtagh, who is widely quoted in the book, and others, Lane gave this account of one such episode:

"A microphone concealed in a hotel where King stayed picked up sounds of a party at which he was present," indicating "sexual activity." The trouble, Lane wrote in a segment dealing with the activities of an alleged "Destroy King" FBI squad, was that "it did not really relate King to the sexual activity and one could barely hear King's voice."



Staff Photo—George A. Clark

Lane: Still Probing

So Hoover ordered the FBI laboratory to "improve" or doctor the tapes so that King's voice could be clearly heard in a context that would prove embarrassing. He then ordered the tape "sanitized" to remove all fingerprints, had it placed in a package which was also sanitized, together with a threatening, typewritten letter, and directed that it be mailed to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference "from a Southern state," which entailed dispatching an FBI agent to Florida who mailed it, and then flew home.

Hoover's intention, Lane writes, was "to precipitate a separation between Dr. King and his wife in the belief that the separation would reduce

his stature."

Hoover also ordered agents, assigned to investigate King and other civil rights activists, to say that the investigations had been ordered by an assistant attorney general "because Hoover didn't want to be connected with any civil rights investigations," Lane quoted Murtagh. "This was the only time when we told anyone that the Justice Department was ordering us to conduct an investigation," Murtagh said. "In any other kind of case, the Bureau would be glad to take credit."

"It was an organized vendetta," in which the Atlanta, New York and Washington FBI field offices took part, Murtagh told Lane at another

point. "The concentration of effort against King was greater than any other single investigation that I saw take place at the Bureau and I saw a lot of them in 20 years. There was a crew of people who did almost nothing for... seven or eight years, except investigate King and try to destroy him.... They were going to get King in one way or another.

Lane charges that the removal of Detective Ed Redditt, who had been assigned to provide security for the civil rights leader during his fatal trip to Memphis on orders from "Washington," the commitment of an important witness to a Tennessee mental institution, and the deployment of "Destroy King" squad members in the ensuing murder investigation, were other elements of that vendetta.

Lane, who now directs the Washington-based Citizens Committee of Inquiry, an organization committed to urging Congress to investigate the murders of both King and Kennedy, does not know if the full extent of the FBI involvement in those events will ever be known. But Lane, who said he has personally received 254 threats against his own life since he began his independent investigation into Kennedy's assassination 14 years ago, says that he does have faith in the Senate Select Committee, which is now conducting its own investigation.

"There will be a moment of truth," he declares, "when they ask the FBI and the CIA to make certain documents available to them, and are refused."

Lane, a former New York State legislator who also founded the Wounded Knee Legal Defense Committee, says however that he has already embarked on his next project. It will be an investigation of "monumental importance," he says, delving into the backgrounds of Americans who provided Fidel Castro with the weapons used in the Cuban revolution.